



## **Tornado Safety**

**Tornado!** Missouri had 80 tornadoes in 2011, which is above the average of 32. The most active month was May with 36. Of course 2011 will be remembered for the Joplin tornado which directly took 158 lives and injured over 1100. We can't stop tornadoes, but by following Tornado Safety Rules, lives can be saved and injuries prevented.

Warning the public of severe weather is the National Weather Service's (NWS) most important job. To help the public prepare for tornado situations, the NWS has adopted a Watch and Warning program.

**Tornado Watch:** This means that conditions are favorable for tornado development. This is the time to prepare. Keep alert by listening to NOAA Weather Radio, or the commercial media for the latest weather information.

**Tornado Warning:** This means a tornado has been sighted or the NWS is seeing signs on radar that indicate a thunderstorm may be capable of producing a tornado at any minute. People in the path of the storm should take immediate life saving action.

In schools, hospitals, factories, shopping centers and other public places, move to designated shelter areas. Interior hallways on the lowest level are best. Stay away from windows and out of auditoriums, gymnasiums, or structures with large free span roofs.

**In Vehicles:** Do not try to outrun a tornado. A tornado does not have to slow down for traffic, stop signs, or curves on the road. Quickly assess your situation. If necessary, seek shelter in a nearby substantial building. If you have no alternative, abandon your vehicle and hide in a nearby ditch or depression and cover your head. Most deaths occur because of the flying debris and head injuries.

**Mobile Homes:** Mobile homes should be abandoned in favor of a more substantial structure if threatened by a tornado. When severe weather is approaching, move to a different location for a couple of hours and wait until the storms have passed. Mobile homes are not built to withstand the strong wind gusts that come from severe thunderstorms or tornadoes.

## **Tornado Myths**

**Myth:** Areas near rivers, lakes, and mountains are safe from tornadoes.

**Fact:** No place is safe from tornadoes. Tornadoes can cross rivers, travel up mountains, and roar through valleys. The terrain changes in Missouri are not believed to be great enough to influence tornado formation or movement.

**Myth:** Low pressure with a tornado causes buildings to "explode" as the tornado passes overhead.

**Fact:** It is the force of the horizontal wind and debris slamming into buildings that causes structural damage during a tornado. It is not the pressure change. The air pressure will drop near a tornado. Many people near a tornado tell of their ears "popping" due to the pressure change.

**Myth:** Windows should be opened before a tornado to equalize pressure and minimize damage.

**Fact:** Opening windows allows damaging winds to enter the structure. Leave the windows alone. It is now believed that a solid structure (no windows or doors open) has a better chance of escaping major damage.

**What if you are out in the open and a tornado approaches?** The best thing to do is to avoid such situations. Try to get to some type of structure for shelter. If nothing is available, as a last resort, go to a low-lying area, such as a ditch, and lie flat. Try to protect your head. Hopefully the flying debris (which is the cause of most deaths and injuries) will fly over you.

**What if you are driving and you see a tornado?** If possible, drive away from the tornado in an opposite direction or at a 90-degree angle away from it. However, in an urban area with traffic, this will not be possible. Abandon your vehicle and go to a nearby substantial structure if you feel you cannot get away from the tornado.

There have been conflicting opinions concerning highway underpasses and tornadoes. While an underpass can offer protection from rain and hail, it may not protect you from a strong tornado. The wind from the tornado will actually accelerate as it blows through the underpass likely sweeping everything away.

**You must quickly assess your situation and decide what you should do. There is not one answer that covers all situations!**